

Headline: An original FOJ family member leaves great memories as she departs

By Michael J. Lewis

They were all lost, and confused, and down. Until one beautiful stranger helped guide them along the way.

Five years ago, Brande Nester and her family were hit with the awful news that nearly every FOJ family has heard: Their son, Bennett, had a brain tumor. The Texas-based family then went through all the range of emotions and doctor's appointments and tears, and while searching online one night Brande found the Friends of Jaclyn Foundation.

And a woman named Stacia Boynton.

"She was someone who handpicked our child to become part of their journey and helped him find support and everlasting friendship," Brande says now, alluding to Bennett's adoption by the Rice University men's tennis team. "Stacia gave us solace and words of encouragement and became much more than just a voice on the other end of a phone or computer. She became a friend, and we know she'll always be there for us."

The story of the Nesters and their relationship with Stacia is not unique: With just a few words or a simple smile, Stacia Boynton has made hundreds of children's lives better.

And isn't that the best thing you could ever say about a person? That just by their words, actions or gestures, they've made things a tiny bit better for those going through a very difficult time?

When it comes to the families and adopted children of Friends of Jaclyn, Stacia has always been there. From the beginning, this longtime friend of founder Jaclyn Murphy has helped spearhead the Friends of Jaclyn Foundation, being an integral part of its growth as both an executive director and adoption coordinator.

How important, and how beloved has she been? Just listen to what some of the FOJ families said about her, as she prepares to officially leave FOJ this month to pursue her dreams in graduate school.

"She's an amazing person, and we are so blessed to have met her along our journey," said Sue Silsby, whose son, Andrew was adopted by the men's hockey team at Stacia's alma mater, the University of New Hampshire. "She has an amazing ability to communicate with the children and their families, taking the time to personally get to know them. She's so kind, thoughtful and caring."

Desiree Murphy, whose then 2 ½ year old daughter Violet was adopted by the Otterbein University women's lacrosse team in 2014, said it was Stacia's compassion that won them over.

"At first I wasn't sure with my daughter being so young that she would understand the concept," Desiree said. "But after speaking to Stacia and having her be so comforting and informative, I was soon very excited.

"Stacia, you have been a shining light in one of the darkest phases of our families' lives," Desiree said. "Please know that what you have done with FOJ matters so much, and we love you so much!"

Marissa Lewis has been an FOJ intern working with Stacia since 2013, and has seen up close how much her "boss" cares.

“She’s so passionate that it just radiates everywhere around her,” Marissa said. “She goes above and beyond for the kids and families, it’s really inspiring to see.”

Even people who have never met Stacia in person rave about her. Gina Anderson’s son, Ian was adopted by the Michigan State men’s hockey team six years ago, and the Andersons have only communicated with Stacia (based in Boston) through phone calls, emails, texts and get-well cards.

“She has warmed our hearts with her continual support for Ian and our family,” Gina Anderson said. “We will forever be grateful for her love and friendship. She is truly a gift to everyone she meets!”

Of that, the opinion is unanimous.

We here at FOJ can’t truly put into words how much we love Stacia, and how we’ll miss her sorely. But we know she’ll always be with us in spirit, and we thank her for helping forge a path that so many have traveled, a journey made just a little easier thanks to her warm heart and compassion.

She truly is one of a kind.



